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## SNAPSHOT

# Restoring Watersheds Helps Farmers

**Healthy, sustainable watersheds are fundamental to improved and sustainable agricultural production in Afghanistan**



Photo: AWATT

*Villagers build a terracing system that will slow water runoff, improve canal conditions, and protect farms in the lower watershed from soil erosion.*

***The project is affecting the lives of farmers by improving agricultural productivity, creating jobs, and increasing farm family incomes.***

Deforestation and heavy grazing of the upper watershed remain serious problems facing Afghanistan's agriculture sector. As forest and grass cover is destroyed on mountain slopes, water rushes down the hillsides resulting in erosion and less water available for farms in the valleys. Flooding from the unchecked run-off destroys existing farmland, carries off valuable topsoil, and leaves silt in the canals – all of which is compounded by unsustainable farming practices in the lower watersheds.

When villagers and farmers in the Kuz Kunar District of Nangarhar Province received a proposal to initiate a full-scale watershed management project, they were concerned about the ability to feed their animals and irrigate their farms, a common response from subsistence farmers in Afghanistan to the concept of watershed rehabilitation.

After numerous meetings with village elders, along with Afghan government officials trained in watershed restoration practices, the farmers agreed the project was worth their effort. The work began in May 2010, employing 900 daily workers from neighboring communities, and will have a lasting effect on 30 villages with a combined population of 13,500.

This watershed project is one of two pilot activities in Nangarhar Province supported by USAID. Terracing of 250 hectares in both the upper and lower watershed effectively slows the runoff, allowing water to seep into the communities' water table, making it available to their farms while protecting their canals.

The major activities in this initiative are promoting community ownership; building terraces, check dams, and V-ditches; planting trees and drought-tolerant grasses on the hillsides; introducing whole-farm management practices; and building the capacity of water user associations. Villages will be actively engaged in the work and management of the upper and lower watershed over the next two years.

Through its Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer project, USAID is helping farmers reclaim damaged watersheds to improve their farmland.